

'Take a Card,' Phones Mysterious Howard; 'It's the Nine of Diamonds --- Right?' Right!

By SIGMAN BYRD
The Stroller

THE TELEPHONE RANG just as I came in from Saturday's stroll, and, when I answered, a man's voice said: "Look in the upper left-hand drawer of your desk and get out that pack of playing cards."

"You must have the wrong number," I said. "The City Hall is Capitol 9371."

"Go ahead and look," the voice insisted. "This is Mysterious Howard."

"Misty!" I exclaimed with pleasure, for it had been months since I helped him saw a woman in half at a party where there hadn't been enough girls to go around. I opened the drawer, and there was a fresh, cold deck of Bicycle cards. "What do I do now?" I asked.

"Take a card," Misty said. "Any card."

I broke the seal, selected a



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card and laid it on the deck—face down, because that Howard was not named Mysterious for nothing.

"Concentrate on the card," he said.

Nine of diamonds, I thought. Nine of diamonds, nine of . . .

"You selected the nine of diamonds," Misty announced. Why don't you stroll around to the shop? I've got some --w stuff."

Misty Left Pros

I was nothing loathe, as Ring Lardner used to say, for it is my opinion that Howard is the world's finest magician. So I tacked over to 908½ Travis, where Misty has purveyed magic at rates ranging from 25 cents to \$300 ever since he retired as a professional magician in 1942.

Misty is a short, wide man with a receding hairline, a round face and gimlet-sharp eyes, although he's totally blind in the right one—from a childhood accident—and has only 21/100 vision in the left. He handed me a small rubber sponge, and told me to hold it tight in my fist. I did, and he made a few passes.

When I opened my fist I had

two sponges. "How's the missus?" I asked.

"She's fine," he said. "She'll be in pretty soon. Hold those two real tight."

"Got your school for magicians opened yet?" I asked, opening my fingers and handing him the three sponges.

"Not yet," he said, fanning out a deck of cards. "Probably open the first of January. Take a card. Any card. Don't let me see it."

I chose the queen of clubs, stuck it back in the deck and watched him riffle the cards. He picked out the five of hearts, handed it to me and said, "Is that the card?"

"No," I said. "I believe you've got a customer."

Card Changes Faces

While Misty sold a tall, dignified-looking gentleman a package of salty sugar, a plate lifter, a box of cigaret loads, a pack of hot chewing gum and a box of exploding matches, he suggested I look at the card I held. It had changed from the five of hearts to the queen of clubs.

"How's the crystal ball business?" I asked. "Sold any lately?"

"That's what I wanted to talk

to you about," Misty said. "Just suppose I should lose the sight in my right eye. Should I stay in the fun shop business or go back on the stage?"

"Go back," I said. "You'd be a sensation. You used to do half your act blindfolded, anyway. And I never heard of a blind magician."

"That's what I'll do," Misty said with a hint of nostalgia in his voice. "I can see it in lights—MYSTERIOUS HOWARD, THE WORLD'S ONLY BLIND MAGICIAN. No, wait a minute. I couldn't see it, could I?"

Mrs. Howard, a tall, attractive brunette, came in at that moment, and Misty took a large guillotine-like contraption down from a shelf and set it on the counter before her. "Darling," he said, "I think I've got this thing working now. Would you mind sticking your arm through this neck-piece?"

Ruth Howard started to place her right arm in the slot under the poised, stainless steel blade, then thought better of it and volunteered her left arm. "Well, (Turn to STROLLING, Page 3)

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if it doesn't work," she said. "we can always use it in the kitchen to slice cheese."

Ghostly Images

FOR THE PAST TWO weeks night strollers in the Main-and-Richmond sector have been startled as they passed the Richmond avenue side of the No. 12 Henke & Pillot Supermarket, to observe ghostly images appearing on the buff wall of the store.

Belles in bustles, full-rigged ships and lush landscapes in full color would break out without warning, and there was also hand-writing on the wall: "New Orleans Woman, by Harnett, Kane" —"Inside USA, by John Gunther" —"The Vixens, by Frank Yerby."

The phenomenon was none of Mysterious Howard's doing, but was due to a breakdown of a projector mirror just across the avenue in the Cobler Book Store, at 111. Charles Cobler explained today that a high wind threw the mirror out of kilter and caused his Kodachrome slides of book jackets to be projected on the Henke wall instead of on the six-foot screen erected for that purpose over the front of his own store.

The electricians have the apparatus working normally now, and G. C. Gaekle, manager of the supermarket, says that's just as well, because Henke sells pocket books in its drug department. "But we didn't really mind," says Mr. Gaekle, "because the pictures were out of focus at that distance."